

WE CLAIM:

1. A computer system implemented method for facilitating a sale of a product from an inventory of a selling entity, the computer system including a memory arrangement and at least one processing unit coupled to the memory arrangement, the method comprising the steps of:

storing in the memory arrangement product inventory information related to the inventory of the selling entity;

storing in the memory arrangement configuration information related to selling entity products offered for sale by the selling entity;

obtaining information regarding a customer's needs related to the selling entity products;

interactively selecting product options to define a configured product which satisfies the customer's needs using the stored configuration information to constrain selection of the product options; and

identifying from the inventory of the selling entity, using the stored inventory information, one or more products which most closely correspond to the configured product.

2. A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising ranking the selected product options according to a value of the product options to the customer and, using the ranking to identify products in inventory corresponding to the configured product.

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3. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the stored configuration information comprises a plurality of configuration rules which define relationships between two
5 of more product options.

4. A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the configuration rules comprises a plurality of logic rules.

10 5. A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the configuration rules comprise constraint rules which define engineering relationships between product options.

15 6. A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the configuration rules comprise resource rules which define relationships between product options in terms of resources used and resources required.

20 7. A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the configuration rules comprise cross-reference rules which define relationships between similar product options.

25 8. A computer system implemented method for facilitating a sale of a product from an inventory of a selling entity, the computer system including a memory arrangement and at least one processing unit coupled to the memory arrangement, the method comprising the steps of:

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storing in the memory arrangement product inventory information related to the inventory of the selling entity;

5 storing in the memory arrangement configuration information related to selling entity products offered for sale by the selling entity;

obtaining information regarding a customer's needs related to the selling entity products; and

10 interactively selecting product options to define a sellable product which satisfies the customer's needs using the stored configuration rules and the stored product inventory information to constrain selection of the product options to product options available in the inventory of the selling entity.

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9. A computer system implemented method for facilitating a sale of a product from an inventory of a selling entity, the computer system including a memory arrangement and at least one processing unit coupled to the
20 memory arrangement, the method comprising the steps of:

storing in the memory arrangement product inventory information related to the inventory of the selling entity;

25 storing in the memory arrangement configuration information related to selling entity products offered for sale by the selling entity;

obtaining information regarding a customer's needs related to the selling entity products;

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presenting product options to a user of the computer system for selection by the user to define a configured product which satisfies the customer's needs using the stored configuration information to constrain
5 selection of the product options; and

providing an indication to the user of the computer system, based on the stored inventory information, of whether selection of the a particular presented product option, if incorporated into the configured product, would
10 preclude obtaining the product from the inventory of the selling entity.

10. A computer system implemented method for facilitating a sale of a product from an inventory of a
15 selling entity, the computer system including a memory arrangement and at least one processing unit coupled to the memory arrangement, the method comprising the steps of:

storing in the memory arrangement product inventory information related to the inventory of the
20 selling entity;

storing in the memory arrangement configuration information related to selling entity products offered for sale by the selling entity;

obtaining information regarding a customer's
25 intended uses of a product to be purchased;

assigning a corresponding value to each of the customer's uses depending on an importance of the use to the customer; and

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identifying, using the stored inventory
information and the obtained information regarding the
customer's intended uses and corresponding value, one or
more products which are in the inventory of the selling
5 entity and which most closely satisfy the customer's
intended use of the product.

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